

## ASSOCIATE INVESTIGATOR PROGRAM

1. **REASON FOR ISSUE:** This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Handbook provides guidelines and application procedures for the Office of Research and Development (ORD) Associate Investigator Program. **NOTE:** *The provisions of this Handbook apply to three of the research services within the ORD (Medical Research Service (MRS), Rehabilitation Research and Development Service (RR&D), and Health Services Research and Development Service (HSR&D)).*

2. **SUMMARY OF MAJOR CHANGES:** This constitutes a revision of existing policy.

3. **RELATED DIRECTIVE:** VHA Directive 1201, dated October 11, 2001.

4. **RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** The Office of Research and Development (12) is responsible for the contents of this VHA Handbook.

5. **RESCISSION:** None.

6. **RECERTIFICATION:** This document is scheduled for recertification on or before the last working date of November 2006.

Thomas L. Garthwaite, M.D.  
Under Secretary for Health

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## ASSOCIATE INVESTIGATOR PROGRAM

### 1. PURPOSE

This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Handbook announces guidelines and application procedures for the Office of Research and Development (ORD) Associate Investigator Program.

**NOTE:** *The provisions of this Handbook apply to three of the research services within the ORD (Medical Research Service (MRS), Rehabilitation Research and Development Service (RR&D), and Health Services Research and Development Service (HSR&D)).*

### 2. BACKGROUND

a. The intent of the Associate Investigator Program is to provide research training for clinician and non-clinician scientists who have little or no research experience. The training will be provided by mentors who are senior principal investigators of Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Research and Development (R&D) non-mentored, national peer reviewed research project awards or senior investigators who are part of Centers of Excellence or Research Enhancement Award Programs (REAPs) funded by MRS, RR&D, or HSR&D. **NOTE:** *Hereafter, all R&D non-mentored, national peer reviewed research project awards are referred to as Merit Review.*

#### b. Definitions

(1) **M.D.** Doctor of Medicine.

(2) **D.D.S.** Doctor of Dental Surgery.

(3) **Ph.D.** Doctor of Philosophy.

### 3. SCOPE

a. **Qualifications.** Applications will be accepted from VA medical centers that have currently funded Centers of Excellence, REAPs, or Merit Review programs.

(1) Recipients of Centers of Excellence and REAPs are expected to participate in the training of new investigators. Funds for trainees budgeted in Centers of Excellence and REAPs will not be distributed until the candidates have been identified and approved by the appropriate VHA Central Office research service. Merit Review programs may also provide post-doctoral research training through the Associate Investigator Program. Funds for approved trainees of Merit Review recipients will be provided as a supplement to the Merit Review program.

(2) Proposed Associate Investigators may hold the M.D., D.D.S., or Ph.D. degrees (or equivalent terminal degree). Applicants who hold the M.D. or D.D.S. degree may not be more than 2-years post-residency or clinical specialty or sub-specialty training. Applicants who hold the Ph.D. degree must have received their degree within 4 years of application and must have been engaged in post-doctoral research activities during that period.

b. **Appointment.** Participants may be approved for an appointment of up to 2 years, with a possible 1 or 2 year extension. The proposed appointment period may not exceed the award period of the mentor's funded program and in no circumstances may exceed 4 years.

(1) During the appointment period, Associate Investigators are not eligible to receive other VA research funding. ORD expects that upon successful completion of this program, candidates will apply for other VA research funding, such as Career Development, Medical Research Merit Review Entry Program (MREP) Awards, or MRS, RR&D, or HSR&D Merit Review Awards.

(2) All VA appointments are on a temporary basis as time-limited appointments. Eligible clinicians may be appointed under Title 38 United States Code (U.S.C.) 7405 (a)(1). Title 38 appointments are determined locally, but may not exceed the level for Intermediate Grade Step 1. Associate Investigators are excluded from all elements of Physicians' and Dentists' Special Pay. Non-clinician Ph.D. applicants may be appointed under Title 5 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 213.3227(a) (Schedule B) at the General Schedule (GS)-11 level. Title 38 and Title 5 employees are required to meet the VA and Federal appointment hiring and citizenship requirements as applicable.

c. **Sponsors**

(1) Each applicant must have a sponsor, who is the principal investigator on a VA Merit Review Program, at the time of application through the projected duration of support for the Associate Investigator. Principal investigators of MREPs, Career Development awardees or Research Career Scientists who have no VA research support other than salary are not eligible to serve as sponsors.

(2) In the case of an Associate Investigator supported by a Merit Review Program, the sponsor must also be the mentor. In the case of an Associate Investigator supported by a Center of Excellence or REAP, a senior investigator associated with the Center or REAP may serve as mentor.

d. **Submission of Applications.** Applications must be prepared in accordance with instructions contained in Appendix B. Applications may be submitted at any time after the Center of Excellence, REAP, or individual Merit Review program is funded, and are not to be submitted as part of the research proposal.

e. **Review of Applications.** Applications are reviewed to ensure suitability of the training and career development plan to the background and career goal of the applicant. The reviews are conducted on an ongoing basis as applications are received.

#### 4. INQUIRIES

Information regarding points of contact for issues related to this Handbook is contained in Appendix A.

**CONTACT INFORMATION**

For further information contact:

- |                                                                      |              |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| a. <b>Medical Research Service (121E) at</b>                         | 202-408-3600 |
| b. <b>Rehabilitation Research and Development Service (122A) at</b>  | 202-408-3670 |
| c. <b>Health Services Research and Development Service (124D) at</b> | 202-273-8256 |

## INSTRUCTIONS FOR PREPARATION AND SUBMISSION OF APPLICATIONS FOR THE ASSOCIATE INVESTIGATOR PROGRAM

**1. Format.** Applications are to consist of single-spaced typed pages. Use only letter-quality print; do not use a dot matrix printer. Do not use photo reduction or a font size smaller than 11 point.

**2. Content.** Each application should consist of the following materials:

a. **Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Form 10-1313-1.** VA Form 10-1313-1 Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Research and Development (R&D) Merit Review Application cover page. In box 4, add the date of the submission. In box 9, insert the name and degree of proposed Associate Investigator. Following the name, insert the words "Associate Investigator Program" in parenthesis. In box 10, use the title of mentor's program. Do not use Boxes 11, 12, 13, 18 or 20.

b. **Nominating Letter.** A nominating letter from the medical center Director stating that the R&D Committee has approved the submission of the application. This letter should address any information pertinent to administrative matters. Alternatively, applications may contain two separate nominating letters from the medical center Director and R&D Committee. One of the letters must acknowledge a commitment from the Associate Chief of Staff for Research and Development (ACOS/R&D) to review the trainee's progress annually.

c. **Curriculum Vitae.** A Curriculum Vitae, which includes the education and employment history as well as honors, awards, publications, and presentations made by the participant. Career aspirations, contributions to the ongoing research program of the mentor, and any other relevant information needs to be included.

d. **Mentor's Support Letter and Description of the Training Program.** A letter from the proposed mentor must be included with the application. This letter is critical for application because it describes the content of the applicant's proposed research-training experience from the mentor's point of view. This letter should contain:

(1) A brief description of the distribution of the mentor's time in research, patient care, teaching, and administration.

(2) An explicit description of the mentor's current obligations, including the number of residents, fellows, and other trainees that the mentor is currently supervising in research, as well as past and projected trainees, with inclusive dates.

(3) A description of the plan for mentoring the applicant, to include: the role of the applicant in the mentor's research program; formal coursework and training experiences planned by the mentor for the applicant; the nature of the mentor's interaction with the applicant; the percentage of the mentor's effort that will be devoted to the applicant; and the degree and type of interaction that the applicant will gain from other researchers in the mentor's program, or elsewhere at the medical center.

(4) A description of the selection process and reasons for selecting the applicant.

e. **Citizenship.** Documentation in the form of a letter or memo from local Human Resource Management (HRM) office stating the applicant meets citizenship requirements.

f. **Facilities Available.** In a paragraph or two, describe the office and research space and its location, specifying whether the space is in a VA facility. If the research space is not in a VA facility, documentation of the prior approval of the Chief Research and Development Officer (CRADO) must be provided with the application.

3. **Incomplete Applications.** Applications will be considered incomplete and returned if they are not submitted in accordance with established procedures. The responsibility for following instructions and preparing a complete submission lies with the research office at the originating VA medical center.

4. **Due Dates.** Applications may be submitted at any time within the funding period of the parent award.

5. **Review Process.** Applications for the Associate Investigator Program are evaluated on the appropriateness of the proposed participants based on the credentials presented. Career aspirations and contributions to the ongoing research program of the mentor are also to be considered. Letters of support, research training, and background are considered important factors.

6. **Awards.** Funds will be available as a supplement to the current Merit Review program of the mentor, or as part of the funding for a Center of Excellence or Research Enhancement Award Program (REAP). Funds to support those applications selected for award will be made available within approximately 2 months of application receipt.

7. **Mailing Addresses.** The original and 6 copies of the application should be mailed to the address listed for the appropriate research service or program:

a. **Medical Research Service**

(1) Medical Research Service (121E)  
810 Vermont Ave, NW  
Washington, DC 20420  
(202) 408-3600

(2) If courier or commercial overnight delivery service is used, send to:

Medical Research Service (121E)  
1400 Eye Street, NW  
Suite 400  
Washington, DC 20005

**b. Rehabilitation R&D Service**

- (1) Rehabilitation R&D Service (122A)  
810 Vermont Ave, NW  
Washington, DC 20420  
(202) 408-3670

- (2) If courier or commercial overnight delivery service is used, send to:

Rehabilitation R&D Service (122A)  
1400 Eye Street, NW  
Suite 700  
Washington, DC 20005

**c. Health Services R&D Service**

- (1) Health Services R&D Service (124D)  
810 Vermont Ave, NW  
Washington, DC 20420  
(202) 273-8256